

AN OVERVIEW OF IMPEDIMENTS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED EARLY CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT (IECD) POLICY IN EPE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated impediments to the implementation of Integrated Early Child Care and Development (IECD) policy in Epe Local government area of Lagos state, south west Nigeria. The sample comprises 106 parents and 106 head teachers using purposive sampling techniques. The instrument used was a two-part questionnaire. Chi-square (X^2) was used to analyse the data. The result showed that most parents in rural areas are not informed about the importance of birth registration at designated National Population Commission centres. The study also showed that few children from age 0-2+ were enrolled in public Early Childcare and Education (ECCE) centres. It was recommended that increased budgetary allocation should be made to education. Massive public awareness campaign for parents and other stakeholders on IECD and on the need for parents to register their children at designated National Population Commission centres for a successful implementation of IECD should be carried out.

Keywords: Childcare, ECCE, Impediments, implementation, IECD

Introduction

Developmental psychologists have demonstrated that in the early years, a child develops all the basic brain and physiological structures upon which later growth and learning are dependent. Therefore, attention to young children from conception onward can help to prevent later difficulties. Good care (health, nutritious foods, feeding, mental stimulation and interaction, regular immunization etc) for infants is the best preventive measure to avoid disabilities and developmental delays (Evans, 2000:16). This connotes that the child's development cannot be compartmentalized into health, nutrition, education, social, emotional, physical and moral variables. All these are interwoven in a child's life and are developing simultaneously. Progress in one area affects progress in others. Similarly, problem in any one area affects all other areas. For example, poor nutrition, poor health and less than optimal care-giving have a negative impact on cognition, motor, social and emotional development.

Therefore, the Nigerian government having realized the holistic nature of children's development moved from mere regulatory to supervisory, monitoring and even financial involvement hence the enactment of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childcare and Development (IECD) in response to the global needs of children. These efforts paid off with the development and production of National Early Childhood Curriculum for children aged 0-5 years by Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) with the support of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

These gestures indicate readiness of the Nigerian government in providing uniformed and comprehensive early child care services and education for proper and better development of youngest citizens of Nigeria at their crucial and formative years of development.

However, as important as these documents are, the challenges of Early Child Care Education (ECCE) programme in Nigeria still persist. These include: ineffective planning and implementation of programmes, accountability and mismanagement of scarce resources, shortage of highly qualified early childhood care-givers/ teachers (Onu, et al 2010). In line with the above, Mindes (2007) added that early childhood educators' challenges are enormous and

they include: parent partnership, respect for cultural diversity, appropriate early intervention assessment and linking curriculum and assessment practice appropriately.

It is also saddening to note that birth registration which is the first step towards recognizing a child's inalienable right as a human being is taken with levity. Globally, the births of more than 50 million children which represent more than 40% of total births worldwide go unregistered each year, just as about 70% of the 5 million children born annually in Nigeria are not registered at birth (UNICEF, 2007). They have no birth certificate and in legal terms they do not exist. Their right to an identity, name and nationality is denied and their access to basic services is threatened. However there is provision for birth registration in the legal frame work. For instance, Section 5 of the Child Right Act (2003) states that "every child has the right to a name and the birth of every child shall be registered." But due to low awareness or no awareness of appropriate place for registration of birth especially in rural and remote communities and children born into very poor families, there is low birth registration which invariably leads to dearth of statistics on accurate number of children to be planned for. Some of the challenges of/ limitations to birth registration in Nigeria have been identified to include: inadequate number of registration centres, limited financial support for birth registration process, lack of awareness of the importance of birth registration and ignorance/illiteracy of the rural dwellers on the importance of birth registration as well as long distance to birth registration centres due to bad roads or non-availability of public transport on those roads and lack of effective registration infrastructure particularly in remote areas (UNICEF 2007).

Another issue of concern in the implementation of National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) is that of inadequate funding. This is because in most developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, the policies, programmes and budgets of the nations have not reflected the seriousness with which the matter ought to be addressed. For instance, a World Bank (2002) survey in Nigeria revealed that the Federal government expenditure on education seems to be below 10% of its overall expenditures. For example, between 1997 and 2002, total allocation to education in the Federal budget ranged between 9.9% and 7.6% with the trend showing a downward plunge (see table 1).

In the same vein, one of the country's strategies for early childcare and education spelt out in the Nigeria Education Sector Diagnosis Framework for Re-engineering the Education sector was the report on Education for All (EFA) 2001 which stated that by 2010, 30% of the National Budget on education would be spent on early childhood care and development programme (Federal Ministry of Education, 2005). This dream could not be achieved as the total budgetary allocation to the education sector in 2010 was about 6%.

Also worthy of note is the issue of quality control. Quality at any level of education embraces all functions and activities of teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staff, learners, facilities, equipment, service to the community and academic environment (UNESCO,1998). Recently, public primary schools in most states of Nigeria have made provision for children below primary school age (i.e. linkage classes) but the fact still remains that most of the existing early child care centers are still owned by private individuals, religious organizations and communities (FME, 2005). Hence, early childhood care and development is still faced with the challenges of providing quality training and recruitment of teachers on a continuous basis and provision of learning materials that are age appropriate.

In a survey of nursery schools in Nigeria, Onu, et al (2010) noted that nursery schools in Nigeria as currently operate on university campuses, school premises, premises of industrial and business organizations, church/mosque premises, town halls and residential buildings need to be assessed for quality assurance in all sectors of the curricula, including aesthetics. The facilities and equipment are considered generally poor and ineffective; yet low income earners cannot afford to send their children/wards to the institutions.

In a related development, Ezirim (2004) noted that out of the 1,429 nursery school teachers and care givers sampled in south eastern Nigeria, only about 20% have teachers with the minimum teaching qualification of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), with much less having university degrees. Many of these teachers/caregivers are secondary school leavers waiting for admission into tertiary institutions. This category of teachers/care-givers used the nursery school as a temporary work place. As a result, they are paid very ridiculous wages (Onu, et al 2010). Furthermore, these often inexperienced and ill-motivated teachers/caregivers have too much workload, therefore resulting in the children receiving ineffective education and inadequate care. This is bound to affect their eventual growth and intellectual development.

Similarly, in a survey carried out in Epe Local government area of Lagos state, South West Nigeria, out of the eighty-nine (89) care-givers in public linkage classes sampled, only five (5) representing 5.6% were first degree holders in non-related areas of specialization, twelve (12) i.e. 13.4% were NCE holders, 62 representing 70% were O' level certificate holders who were equally waiting to complete the requirement for admission into tertiary institutions like their colleagues in the South Eastern part of the country while the remaining 10 (11%) had other non-relevant qualifications (Usman-Abdulqadri, 2009).

Also of concern is the category/age range of children found in the public linkage classes. Integrated early child care and development programmes, being a multi-sectoral approach to the holistic care, growth and development of young children, both the policy and curriculum for IECD cover age range 0-5years but in reality at the moment larger percentage of children found particularly in public primary schools with linkage classes are normative age groups from 3-5years. This contrasts sharply with a study carried out in public primary schools in Epe Local Government Area of Lagos state, south west Nigeria which revealed that children aged 0-2 years were not found in linkage classes, 30.2% were children from ages 2-3 years while 69.8% were found to be from ages 3-5 years (Usman-Abdulqadri, 2009).

This among other problems/challenges prompted the present study which attempted to x-ray the impediments to implementation of IECD policy in Epe Local Government area of Lagos state, South West Nigeria. Obviously, the Nigerian government does not relent in formulating policies, planning intervention programmes, organizing conferences, collaborating with international agencies in line with global trend on care, survival, growth and development of Nigerian youngest citizens.

In reality however, translating all well articulated policy statements, proposal of professionals after rigorous deliberation at conferences, workshops, seminar etc. into practice is always a major problem hence the gap between policy formulation and implementation has always remained wide. One of the factors responsible for this ugly situation is weak monitoring and evaluation mechanism leading to incoherent and inconsistent policy which in turn makes the quality of management, policy implementation and curriculum development to be compromised (Anyagbu, et al 2009).

Specifically, this study will determine:

- Whether there is a difference in the number (percentage) of children aged 0-2 years enrolled in both private and public early child care centres.
- Whether there is a difference in the awareness level of urban and rural parents on child birth registration.

The investigators are optimistic that the outcome of this research would shed more light on whether government (public) primary schools with linkage classes admitted children below 3 years or admission was restricted to children 3 years and above.

In the light of the above, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- i. There will be no significant difference between the number of children aged 0-2 years admitted in private and public early child care centres.
- ii. There will be no significant difference between awareness level of urban and rural parents on child birth registration.

Methodology

All parents of children of pre-primary school age and all head teachers of both public and private primary schools with ECCE centres in Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State South West Nigeria constituted the population of the study. The sample comprised fifty-three (53) parents of children of pre-primary school age in public primary schools representing the number of public schools with linkage classes in the study area, fifty-three (53) parents whose children attended private nursery classes and fifty-three (53) head teachers each in both public and private primary schools with ECCE centres were used, totaling two hundred and twelve (212) respondents. Purposive sampling technique was used.

The instrument used for the study was a two-part Overviewing Impediments to Implementation of Integrated Early Child care and Development (IECD) Policy Questionnaire (OIIIECDPQ) designed and validated by the researchers. It has been used in a previous study (Viatonu, et al 2011).

Section A of the questionnaire consisted of items requesting personal information from the respondents such as sex, name of school, location of school to determine whether it is located in the urban or rural area. Section B consisted of items dealing with challenges/problems facing

the implementation of Integrated Early Child Care and Development (IECD) policy in Lagos State. The items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale.

A test-retest method was used which produced a correlation coefficient of 0.87 when administered to selected subjects in private nursery schools in the same local government area. This showed a strong relationship between the selected subjects and the actual respondents. There was an interval of one week before the same instrument was administered to the actual respondents to compare their responses. The instrument was found to be reliable.

Fifty-three (53) questionnaires were distributed to head teachers of public primary schools with ECCE classes and another fifty-three (53) questionnaires to proprietors/proprietresses of private schools in the study area. One hundred and six (106) questionnaires were distributed to parents of children within pre-primary school age range (53 to parents in urban areas and another 53 to parents in rural areas). The questionnaires were collected the same day thus ensuring one hundred percent (100%) returns. Simple percentage was used to show the gender distribution of the respondents (see table 2) while Chi-square (χ^2) was used to test the two hypotheses stated in the study (tables 3 & 4).

Table 3 shows a significant difference in number of children aged 0-2⁺ admitted to both private and public ECCE centres. The calculated X^2 value (70.97) is less than the critical value (9.49) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, H_{01} is accepted.

Table 4 also reveals a significant difference in awareness level of urban and rural parents on child birth registration. The Calculated X^2 Value (37) is less than the critical value (9.49) at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, H_{02} is thereby accepted.

Discussion

The results of the study have shown that public ECCE centres admitted very few children below age 3. Most of the children enrolled are 3 years and above, whereas private ECCE centres admitted all categories of children of pre-primary school age. The implication of this is that there is still a very wide gap between formulation of National Policy for Integrated Early child care and Development, development of curriculum for children 0-5 years and the reality in the public ECCE centres. This finding is in line with Federal Ministry of Education Baseline (2005) which reveals that barely 20% of Nigerian children aged 3-5 years were attending some form of organized early childhood education centres.

The study further revealed that parents in the urban areas are better informed on the registration of child's birth at National Population Commission (NPC) designated centres than the parents in the rural areas. However, population in the rural areas in Nigeria outweighs that of the urban . As at 2006, rural-urban population was 54% to 36% respectively (UNICEF 2007). The finding in this study is in line with UNICEF Basic statistics on birth registration which stated that birth registered in the rural areas and urban areas of Nigeria as at 2007 was 21.2% to 50.5% respectively. Though some of the parents the researchers interacted with did mention that their children's births were registered with Faith- based organizations (FBOs) and not with the National population commission (NPC) yet this category of parents are ignorant of the fact that registration of their children's birth with NPC gives them (children) national identity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has revealed that majority of children found in public ECCE centres are 3 years and above while provision is made for all categories of children in private schools i.e. day care for children 0-2 years, play group for children 2-3 years, Nursery and Kindergarten for children 3-5 or 6 years though most schools mistake Kindergarten for Nursery. It was also revealed in the study that urban parents are better informed on birth registration than rural parents. The result of this study also showed that quality control is another major problem inhibiting against proper implementation of IECD policy.

Furthermore, underfunding of the education sector in Nigeria was also revealed as another contending issue in the implementation of IECD policy and curriculum. This is because the percentage of budget allocation to education in Nigeria is on the downward trend (see table 1) and this will no doubt hamper the implementation of IECD programme.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made: government should as a matter of urgency increase budgetary allocation to education which will invariably have a positive impact on all areas of education including early childhood education.

- In order not to deny Nigerian Children particularly those in rural areas of their right to identity, name, nationality and access to basic services, government should as a matter of priority embark on massive public enlightenment and sensitization of parents and other

stakeholders on IECD and the need to register their children's birth at NPC designated centres.

- For appreciable success to be recorded in birth registration, government should make provision for birth registration centres at every ward in local government areas.
- Adequate infrastructure should be provided in all public primary schools across the country to accommodate all categories of pre-primary school- age children.
- To achieve appreciable quality delivery, control and quality assurance, rigorous monitoring and timely evaluation should become a permanent feature of the IECD.

Finally, the scope of this study was limited to only one local government area (Epe) in Lagos state, south west Nigeria. However, more empirical evidence will be needed from more local government areas using a larger sample before a wider generalization can be made. It is therefore suggested that a similar but wider study be conducted on the need to monitor the implementation strategies of Integrated Early Childcare and Development (IECD) on curriculum development in Lagos state.

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Table 1: Federal Government Annual Expenditure on Education (1997 – 2002)

Expenditure Area	1997 %	1998 %	1999 %	2000 %	2001 %	2002 %
Recurrent	12.3	12.0	11.7	9.4	9.5	9.1
Capital	6.1	7.5	5.0	8.5	6.0	6.0
Total	9.9	9.6	9.0	9.0	7.5	8.0

Source: FGN, Annual Budgets 1997-2002

Table 2 :Gender distribution of respondents

	Headteacher(public)		Heateacher(private)		Parent(rural)		Parent(ur)	
Gender	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Male	18	33.96	30	56.60	22	41.51	17	32.08
Female	35	66.04	23	43.40	31	58.49	36	67.92
Total	53	100	53	100	53	100	53	100

Table 3: Chi-square (χ^2) analysis of categories/age-range of children enrolled into public and private primary schools with ECCE centres.

Group	Responses				Total	Rem
Public schools	SA	A	D	SD	53	*S
	40(O) 21E	7(O) 4.5E	2(O) 6.5E	4(O) 21E		
	2(o) (21)E	2(o) (4.5)E	11(o) (6.5)E	38(o) (21)E		
Private schools	2(o) (21)E	2(o) (4.5)E	11(o) (6.5)E	38(o) (21)E	53	
Total	42	9	13	42	106	

Key: O = Observed frequency

E = Expected frequency

* S = Significant

Table 4: Chi-square (χ^2) analysis on awareness of rural and urban parents on child birth registration.

Group	Responses				Total	Rem
Urban Parents	SA	A	D	SD	53	*S
	4O(O) (25)E	4(O) (4)E	6(O) (18)E	3(O) (6)E		
Rural Parents	10(O) (25)E	4(O) (4)E	30(O) (18)E	9(O) (6)E	53	
Total	50HKI	8	36	12	106	

Key: O = Observed frequency

E = Expected frequency

* S = Significant